Trade Deficit

*269. SHRI THANGABAALU: Will the Minister of COMMERCE be pleased to state:

(a) what was the percentage reduction foreign trade deficit from 1985-86 to 1986-87; and

(b) what are the reasons for the low percentage reduction in deficit?

THE MINISTER OF COMMERCE (SHRI P. SHIV SHANKER). (a) and (b) According to the provisional data available for the first nine months of the current financial year, the trade deficit at Rs. 5210.55 crores during April—December, 1986 was Rs. 1000.45 crores lower as compared to Rs. 6211.00 crores during the corresponding period of the previous year, thereby registering a significant decline of 16.1 per cent. This significant decline in trade deficit is attributable to improve performance of exports while imports have increased only marginally. During April-December, 1986, the exports increased by 17.3 per cent while imports increased only 2.3 per cent as compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

Effect of Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980

*271. SHRI SHANKER SINH VAGHELA:

SHRI PRAMOD MAHAJAN:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the present Forest (Conservation) Act, 1980 guidelines make prior permission necessary even for using the degraded forest land for afforestation and that this has come in the way of even forest restoration schemes and thus rendering the provisions of the Act counter-productive;

(b) what are the facts and the consequences thereof; and

(c) what advice has been given to the States for going ahead with forest restoration schemes?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BHAJAN LAL): (a) to (c) It is not true that afforestation of degraded forests requires prior approval of Government of India. The approval of Government of India is required if degraded forest lands are to be assigned to individuals and private institutions. The provision in the guidelines that the State Government cannot assign Government forest lands to individuals and private institutions for afforestation is not counter-productive to the work of forest restoration.

Remote sensing Survey of Forest Area

*272. PROF. B. RAMACHANDRA RAO:

SHRI ADINARAYANA REDDY:

Will the Minister of ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS be pleased to state:

(a) what is the total forest area in the country as per the latest remote sensing survey;

(b) what is the rate at which the forest area in the country is dwindling every year;

(c) what steps are being taken to ensure that 5 million hectares is afforested every year; and

(d) whether there is any proposal to lease vacant land to paper industry to enable them to develop the forest needed by them for their raw materials?

THE MINISTER OF ENVIRONMENT AND FORESTS (SHRI BHAJAN LAL): (a) According to the National Remote Sensing Agency, the total area with tree cover in the country for the period 1980—82 was estimated at 46.35 million hectares.

(b) According to the survey done by National Remote Sensing Agency, the rate of forest depletion between 1972—75 and 1980—82 is estimated at 1.3 million hectares per year.

(c) The National Wastelands Development Bord has been set up in 1985 with the object of bringing 5 million hectares of land every year under fuel wood and fodder plantations. A people's movement for afforestation is being developed.

(d) Central Government are not promoting the entry of private companies into afforestation projects on forests lands. The proposals for afforestation of wastelands are being processed by the State Governments concerned.

Solution to Ethnic problem in Sri Lanka

*273. SHRI V. GOPALSAMY:

SHRI T. R. BALU:

Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) what were the proposals placed by the Indian delegation before the Sri Lankan delegation during the SAARC meet to solve the ethnic crisis;

(b) whether the Sri Lankan delegation placed any counter proposals;

(c) if so, what are the details thereof; and

(d) what was the outcome of these proposals and the dialogue that followed thereafter?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH): (a) None, Sir.

(b) and (c) Do not arise.

(d) After the SAARC Summit, further discussions were held at New Delhi and Colombo and a set of proposals had emerged on the 19th December, 1986. Sri Lanka's vacillation about their commitment to these proposals, followed by the imposition of a communication and fuel blockade on Jaffna and military operations in the Eastern and Northern Provinces, has caused us to suspend our good offices.

South-South Cooperation

*274. DR. H. P. SHARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the South-South Cooperation was mooted to be one of the major planks of discussion at the Harare Summit;

(b) whether any institutionalised format was given to such Cooperation; and

(c) if so, with what results?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI K. NATWAR SINGH): (a) Yes, Sir.

(b) A format for South-South Cooperation already existed in the form of the Action Programme for Economic Cooperation (APEC) of the Nonaligned Movement and the Caracas Programme of Action (CPA) of the Group of 77. A separate Plan Action to meet the critical economic situation in Africa had also been adopted in 1985 by the Nonaligned Movement.

The Harare Summit did not create any new institution in the field of South-South Cooperation. It ration-